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ABSTRACT

The knowledge that books are still not a permanent feature of everyone's daily life in the developed nations of the world, and that many nations of the Third World are still experiencing a real book famine led to the Unesco declaration proclaiming 1972 International Book Year with its theme, "Books for All." This theme is reflected in the four phases of the program: encouragement of authorship and translation with due regard to copyright, production and distribution of books, promotion of the reading habit, and books in the service of education, international understanding and peaceful co-operation. Throughout its history, Unesco has dealt with the problem of book development in various ways, including: the development of libraries, production of textbooks, reading encouragement programs, the adoption of several international conventions regarding the free flow of books, and programs to promote books in the developing countries. (SJ)

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Address by
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Director-General
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Scientific and Cultural Organization
(Unesco)

at the opening meeting of the
Symposium on Books in the Service
of Peace, Humanism and Progress

Moscow, 12 September 1972

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Madam Minister,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I first, on behalf of the Organization, express my warm gratitude to the Soviet authorities for the generous hospitality they have extended, in this Trade Union Hall, to the Symposium on the theme of "Books in the Service of Peace, Humanism and Progress", convened by Unesco in the context of International Book Year. I am sure that I speak for everybody in conveying our very special thanks to Mrs. Furtseva, the Minister of Culture of the USSR and the President of the National Organizing Committee for International Book Year, for the excellent working and living conditions which have so kindly been provided for us in Moscow.

No place could be more suitable for a meeting of this kind than the capital of a great country whose leaders and peoples are striving with such determination steadily to raise the standard of education and culture of all, and who, as we have just been reminded regard books as a particularly efficacious means not only of furthering the progress of individuals and society but also of promoting peace, friendship among the nations, and the struggle against racialism and colonialism. In 1972, the year which also marks the fiftieth anniversary of its creation, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics can be justly proud of the remarkable results it has achieved in book promotion, which give it a leading place particularly where book production and the number of translations are concerned. I should like to take this opportunity of paying tribute to the Soviet Union for this, and of conveying to the Soviet Government and people, on the occasion of this anniversary, my warmest good wishes for their happiness and prosperity.

I extend cordial greetings from Unesco to the experts from the various regions of the world who have kindly agreed to take part in this symposium, to the observers from the international non-governmental organizations representing the world of books, and to all the many people assembled in this fine hall, whose presence is evidence of the profound interest that International Book Year has aroused all over the world.

It was on 9 November 1970 that the General Conference of Unesco, at its sixteenth session, adopted by acclamation the resolution proclaiming 1972 International Book Year. Under the terms of that resolution, Member States and international non-governmental organizations interested were invited, among other things, "to initiate and carry out programmes of activities designed to promote the writing, production, circulation and distribution of books and to make the International Book Year a national reading year". This unanimous decision followed a recommendation adopted a year earlier by Unesco's Executive Board on the proposal of the Soviet member.

If the significance and importance of International Book year are to be properly appreciated, it is perhaps not out of place to say a few words here about the context in which it was decided to launch this great world-wide campaign, the general theme of which is "Books for All".

Begun as early as the 30's with the first publication of pocket editions, the revolution - and the word is not too strong - which has come about in book production techniques has made it possible to put on the market, in steadily increasing quantities, inexpensive books of high quality, ranging from popular fiction to textbooks, from literary classics to technical handbooks and works of research. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of titles doubled and the number of copies increased threefold in world book production. On the eve of the proclamation of International Book Year, the figures stood at some 500,000 titles and between 7 and 8 thousand million copies a year. At the same time, owing to the population explosion, the general provision of schooling, the progress achieved in teaching adults to read and write, and greater leisure, the number of readers has grown considerably and the demand for books and reading-matter has steadily increased. Thanks to the new techniques of mass distribution, the sales and circulation network has developed extensively, and books are no longer found only on bookshop shelves but also at news-stands, in supermarkets, railway stations and even in petrol service stations. Library services, including public libraries, school libraries and works libraries, have also expanded considerably; and the library, which was once the prerogative of the city, is gradually gaining ground in the countryside, and thus reaching a larger number of potential readers.

But encouraging though the picture may seem at first sight, closer analysis shows, to begin with, that it reflects the position in the industrialized countries only, and next that, even in those countries, there are still many dark patches.

Indeed, surveys carried out in countries where the publishing trade is flourishing and where the standard of living is relatively high have shown a very considerable percentage of non-readers. Whether it be that the individuals questioned assert that they no longer have time for reading or that books are too expensive, or that they do not always find books to satisfy their tastes or their needs, or that, in certain strata of the population, the feeling sometimes persists that books are only for intellectuals, it is clear that books are still far from being everywhere a permanent feature of daily life.

Some think that the extraordinary development of audio-visual techniques has probably had much to do with the decline in the public's taste for reading. In point of fact, this is extremely doubtful, since it has been found that, after a sharp initial expansion, the rate of development in broadcasting, and then television, is showing a progressive tendency in the most advanced countries to drop back to the level of that for books. Furthermore, it seems quite clear that the cinema, radio and television, which are, after all, powerful means for bringing culture to the masses, win over to reading listeners and viewers who previously stood aside from any form of cultural activity. For my own part, I am convinced that the increasing variety of ways of acquiring and sharing in

knowledge and culture does not result in the replacement of one approach - the printed word - by another - the picture - but, on the contrary, gives rise to the need for a composite approach combining both operations of the mind for its greater development.

Whatever the truth may be on this point, which relates essentially to the developed countries, what needs most emphasis is that by far the greater number of the developing countries are by no means yet reaping full benefit from the effects of the "book revolution", but are suffering in varying degrees from a shortage of books which, in some cases, is tantamount to a real famine. In Africa, for example, regional production is sufficient to meet only a quarter of the needs, which are not fully satisfied even by imports. The situation in Asia and the Arab States is scarcely any better. In Latin America, where production is almost at the required level, transport and communication difficulties seriously hamper the work of making books available to potential readers. The fact is that, although the developing countries represent about 70 per cent of the earth's population, they produce all in all only a fifth of the books published in the world, the remaining four-fifths being produced by 30 or so industrialized countries. In the developed countries as a whole, the number of copies available each year for each possible reader is nearly ten times as high as in the developing countries.

As regards material for publication too, the countries of the Third World also depend to a very large extent on the developed countries. Indeed, as they do not usually have enough of their own authors to write the books they need on the most varied subjects, especially in the fundamental fields of education, science and technology, these countries must now, and no doubt for many years to come, have recourse, for the purposes of their development, to the translation of books published in the more advanced countries. While mass contributions from abroad are essential at the present moment, however, they can be no more than a palliative, not a remedy. Only by establishing and developing a national publishing industry in each country can a satisfactory solution to this problem be found.

And it is only when this has been achieved that the developing countries will be able to make the influence of their cultures felt - cultures of which, in many cases, all too little is still known because they have been left aside by the main streams of international cultural exchanges. Let me just remind you, in this connexion, that according to the latest statistics, nearly three quarters of the 40,000 or so titles translated annually in the world come, in descending order, from English, French, Russian and German, whereas if the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America are excepted, only 3 per cent come from the languages of the developing countries.

These, briefly summarized, are the main considerations of which the world community - international non-governmental organizations representing the world of books as well as the governments and public and private bodies in Member

States - has become aware over the past few years. These are the considerations that led it to contemplate proclaiming an International Book Year with the object of calling forth a great communal effort of thought, and of promoting the preparation of plans for concerted, systematic action on behalf of books.

It goes without saying that neither the Member States nor the Secretariat became alive to the problems of book-development all of a sudden in 1970. Since its earliest days, the Organization, as stipulated in its Constitution, has always sought to "promote the free flow of ideas by word and image" and to assure "the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books". Without making any attempt to draw up a real balance-sheet of what Unesco has done for books over the last 25 years, I should like nevertheless to list a few of the areas in which it has been particularly active:

the development of libraries, including the assistance it provided immediately after the Second World War for the reconstruction of libraries devastated during the hostilities and, later on, for the restoration of those damaged by the floods in Florence and Venice;

the production of textbooks for schools;

encouragement of reading in the context of education programmes for the young and literacy programmes for adults;

the removal of obstacles to the free flow of books, with the adoption, under Unesco's auspices, of several international conventions.

More directly, about the mid-1960's, with a view to correcting the serious imbalance to which I referred just now, the General Conference adopted a major long-term programme for the promotion of books in the developing countries. A series of four regional meetings of experts was arranged under this programme, between May 1966 and May 1972, in Tokyo for Asia, Accra for Africa, Bogotá for Latin America and Cairo for the Arab States, in order to determine the needs of each of the regions under consideration, to evaluate resources, define priorities and advocate measures for improving the situation. These meetings drew attention, among other things, to the need for planning book-development and including it in long-term plans for educational and economic development, and for organizing regional and international co-operation. In accordance with the recommendations of these meetings, regional book development centres have been set up in Tokyo and Bogotá, the establishment of a similar centre for the Arab countries is at present being considered; and Unesco missions have been to Africa to study the possibility of setting up two such centres on that continent as well.

The soundness and the scope of the work done at these meetings, in which specialists from the principal book-producing countries took part as well as experts from the regions concerned, made a most favourable impression on governments and on the professional associations of the book trade. By drawing attention to the necessity and possibility of concerted action, they did much to strengthen the sense of community in the world of books. In particular, they

gave the developed countries an opportunity of crystallizing, by reference to factual data, their intention of helping the developing countries to equip themselves with the infrastructure needed for the establishment of a national publishing industry. In general, they promoted the gradual emergence of the idea that world-wide action should be taken to draw the attention of the public to the rôle that books, even now when they are changing and are being challenged by some people, can and should play in society. In short, these meetings showed that the time had come to proclaim an International Book Year.

The launching of the world campaign decided upon in 1970 was well timed, as is witnessed by the enormous interest it immediately aroused on all sides at all levels.

Today, Unesco's 129 Member States, almost without exception, are taking part in this campaign, carrying out extensive national programmes of activities which cover the whole range of problems arising in connexion with book development in the contemporary world, and which have had to place far greater emphasis on practical projects than on purely formal ceremonies. The programme of the country which is our host today, with its broad range of activities being carried out in its 15 Republics and its international co-operation projects, provides an outstanding example.

What Unesco has done, on the other hand, has drawn in the whole United Nations system. The Economic and Social Council, having before it a Unesco report on "Book Development in the Service of Education", unanimously adopted, at its fiftieth session, in May 1971, a resolution supporting International Book Year and inviting "Member States and, within their respective fields of competence, the institutions and organs of the United Nations system, as well as other interested intergovernmental organizations, to take appropriate steps to attain the objectives of International Book Year". I am happy to be able to say today that there has been a wide response to that appeal.

The contribution of the international non-governmental organizations to this joint undertaking has also proved extremely fruitful. Even when book development, from one standpoint or another, is not their primary concern, these organizations are always more or less directly interested in books as instruments of communication, knowledge and culture. Since these organizations can draw on a great network of national branches and committees all over the world, they have been able not only to provide stimulus and liaison in the preparation of the programmes of Member States, but also to make the objects of the Book Year widely known through their publications, and to organize extremely interesting meetings, studies, research projects and seminars at the international level.

As is only natural, those organizations whose members are persons with a professional interest in books - writers and translators, publishers, booksellers, librarians and documentalists - were closely associated with the preparation of the campaign and have been particularly active in carrying it out. As

early as April 1971, for instance, they formed a support Committee for International Book Year, which is very broadly representative as regards both geographical and disciplinary coverage, and is, successfully stimulating and co-ordinating the efforts of the various sectors of the book world. Their combined efforts have led, among other things, to the drawing up and adoption of a Charter of the Book, consisting of ten articles which define very clearly the basic principles that should govern the treatment of books, both nationally and internationally. The presence here today of observers from those organizations is further evidence of their continuing interest in Unesco's undertaking; and I should like publicly to express my gratitude to them.

Lastly - and this is not the least encouraging aspect of the preliminary assessment that can be made at this stage - International Book Year immediately met with a public response which is steadily extending. The countless articles that have appeared in the press, the special programmes broadcast on radio and television, and the flood of letters reaching the Secretariat both from the world's large cities and from the most remote country districts, bear witness that, whatever may have been said to the contrary, books continue to exert a powerful attraction on adults and young people. In the messages delivered by the highest political and spiritual authorities in connexion with International Book Year, and in the letters received from private individuals, books are very often referred to, feelingly, as tried and true old friends.

The activities undertaken by Member States and organizations of all kinds have been concentrated on the four themes approved by the General Conference when it adopted the resolution proclaiming 1972 International Book Year. Let me remind you what they are:

encouragement of authorship and translation, with due regard to copyright - a theme including, in my opinion, questions relating to the freedom and responsibilities of the writer, which I am sure you will not fail to discuss;

production and distribution of books, including the development of libraries;

promotion of the reading habit;

books in the service of education, international understanding and peaceful co-operation.

These themes, each of capital importance, which are closely bound up with one another, will provide the warp and woof of the discussions about to begin here among experts from all the regions of the world, representing a variety of disciplines. This is indicative of how fruitful the discussion of these topics is likely to be and of how particularly helpful, ladies and gentlemen, your comments and suggestions will be to us in following up the great effort of thought and action that the Book Year has called forth from the international community. It is quite clear from the reports sent in to the Secretariat that governments, organizations and public or private institutions do not look upon

International Book Year as an undertaking which is to come to an end on 31 December next but, on the contrary, as the starting point for action which will be continued, along the various lines its many ramifications have suggested, for many years to come.

For my own part, I have no doubt that your discussions will mark an important stage in the elucidation of the problems to be faced and the determination of the means to be used for solving them, and that they will consequently have a far-reaching impact. Most heartily and sincerely, therefore, I wish you every success in your work.